

Rockville 2008 Citizen Survey
City Clerk's Office

Significant Results

The information of primary interest to the City Clerk's Office relates to a series of new questions regarding voting behavior among residents. Staff and members of the City's Board of Supervisors of Elections met to go over the data and compiled the following as a first response. While there was some skepticism about the responses to the questions in light of the percentage of residents who said they voted in the 2007 election (42%) when the actual percentage of residents who did vote was substantially smaller (19.93%), the Board felt that some of the confusion could have stemmed from the timing of the survey near the presidential election and/or citizens' general lack of understanding about levels of government. However, the Board and staff felt that, regardless of the accuracy of the initial response, there were some opportunities for improvement in reaction to the specific reasons why voters might not participate in local elections.

Preliminary Department Response

Don't have enough information about candidates/issues or know who to vote for:

- Provide more in Rockville Reports in addition to the special issue in November - ongoing information during the summer, perhaps an expanded section in October
- Offer more information on the web with a dedicated web link
- Put weekly information in "This Week in Rockville" e-newsletter as appropriate (Example: deadline for registration; notice that sample ballots have been mailed)
- Create some informational handouts to distribute at City of Rockville facilities
- Provide links from candidate information to election information and vice versa
- Add some information within the new area of website targeting new residents

Local elections are not held with general elections

This was an issue that was examined in depth by the 2002 Charter Review Commission. The Commission's conclusion was to recommend continuing the current practice of separate, "off-year" elections. In an initial review of the background information in the Commission's report, the Board of Elections reiterated its agreement with that conclusion based on the following points outlined in the Commission's report. If further investigation is desired, it might be necessary to convene another review of the Charter.

- Pros:
 - Voter participation very likely would increase, with more residents turning out to vote for the larger jurisdictions and then casting municipal votes
 - The City might save some costs by piggy-backing onto the county's arrangements
 - City elections might be easier to conduct as an adjunct of general election voting since everything would be subsumed into the County's arrangements for same
 - Electronic voting machines and registration allow city voters to be distinct from other voters for purposes of City-only races, lessening problems at locations near the city limits

- Electronic voting machines can tabulate the results along with voted materials for other races
- All voting locations would be consistent
- Cons:
 - General elections are confusing at best (as indicated by the confusing response to the initial question) as there are so many candidates and issues across multiple jurisdictions. Holding distinct City elections helps the municipal voters focus on Rockville politics and those City issues that are locally important
 - With coinciding elections necessitating concurrent campaigning, Rockville candidates may have difficulty competing for public attention with bigger campaign efforts in the larger jurisdictions. This will make City campaigns more difficult and expensive to stage
 - Cost of campaigns likely would rise due to greater expenditure in getting local candidate messages out in competition with voter attention to candidates and issues in larger jurisdictions. More costly campaigns could discourage candidate participation due to the need to increase fundraising
 - Non-partisan campaigns are a corner stone of Rockville elections. Public confusion is likely regarding non-partisan City politics amid the partisan atmosphere of general elections
 - While City voting numbers may quantitatively increase, this may not translate into qualitative improvement. There may be a tendency for voters who turn out for larger jurisdiction ballot items to casually vote for City candidates/issues
 - The City would abrogate control of some desirable election aspects to the County administration, such as districting, order/presentation of ballot items, voting equipment, etc.
 - Neighborhood identity within the City may be weakened by eliminating distinct municipal districts and polling places

Just don't care about local politics /Feel their opinions don't matter

- City stories about the election might take a different twist emphasizing how the election affects citizens' daily lives in very real ways (water, refuse and recycling, development, code enhancement, etc.)

Too busy/no time

- Promote the use of the sample ballot
- Consider some "after hours" opportunity for absentee voting (evenings, weekends)

Intimidated/overwhelmed by the process

- Stress that the judges are at the polls to assist voters
- Possible use of scanners with a paper trail may help to allay some trepidation about the process, especially the machines

Don't have a way to get to the polls

- Publicize the opportunity for senior citizens to ride the Senior Bus
- Publicize the Rockville Shuttle information if it will help get anyone to Beall Elementary School, Twinbrook and Thomas Farm Community Centers

Rockville 2008 Citizens Survey
City Manager's Office

Significant Results

- Quality of life measures reflect the quality of services provided across all City departments, under the day-to-day management and leadership of the City Manager's Office (CMO). The ratings of overall quality of life, quality of neighborhood, Rockville as a place to raise children and Rockville as a place to retire all increased between 2007 and 2008.
- Quality customer service is a high priority and organization wide customer service initiatives are managed through the City Manager's Office (CMO). Although the reduction was not statistically significant, some ratings of customer service fell between 2007 and 2008, including ratings of courtesy, responsiveness, follow up, and overall customer service.
- Every City department promotes communication and engagement with Rockville residents. The Public Information and Neighborhood Resources staff in the CMO support and lead all of the other departments' efforts. Significant results in communication and engagement include:
 - Respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement 'The City of Rockville government welcomes citizen involvement.' That rating increased one point on the 100 point scale between 2007 and 2008
 - 32% of respondents reported that they do not get enough information from the City about opportunities to participate in the public process
 - The percent of respondents who visited the web site in the last 12 months increased from 60% to 68%
 - The percent of respondents who watched a Mayor and Council meeting or other Channel 11 programming fell from 39% to 35%
 - More respondents report that they got most of their information about the City from Rockville Reports than any other information source in 2008
- The benchmark data shows that Rockville compares very positively to survey results in other communities. The report indicates that of the 61 survey questions available for comparison, Rockville rated above the norm for 67% of the questions, similar to the norm for 20% and below the norm for 13%.

Preliminary Department Response

Based on a preliminary review of the survey results, CMO plans to:

- Find more ways to anticipate community needs and issues (e.g. enhance and support cross-departmental communication and problem solving). Better anticipation of needs will allow for more proactive attention to community problems.
- Share the customer service results with the City's Customer Service Action Team to develop a FY 2010 work program that addresses the areas that rated lower in 2008 than in 2007.

- Take advantage of having all media in the CMO to strengthen our presence in the community.
- Consider offering more communication options in Spanish and Chinese, to assist those residents in the City who cite these languages as their primary language.
- Continue to increase web based communication efforts by improving the usability of the web and by utilizing e-mail, web feeds and other online services. The CMO will seek to increase opportunities to involve and inform the community, and make doing business with the City easier.
- Continue with current plans to produce more original programming for Channel 11 that focuses on items of interest to Rockville residents, including stories that feature Rockville's neighborhoods.
- Identify and experiment with more out of the box methods to invite residents to participate in decision making and to make participation convenient and engaging.

Rockville 2008 Citizen Survey
Department of Community Planning & Development Services

Significant Results

In recent years, development and growth have been major focal points for Rockville citizens. These issues and their accompanying quality of life components- transportation, economic development, sustainability, community appearance, and housing affordability - are all CPDS related topics measured by the survey. For the most part, these elements received good marks from the survey. Quality of life received a 94% in the good-excellent range, quality of new commercial development received a 69% good to excellent rating and quality of new residential development received a 68% good to excellent rating, all of which are above the national norm.

The building permit process scored a 54% good to excellent rating, which is above the national norm. However, it should be noted that the primary users of the building permit process are contractors, engineers and other construction professionals who work with the process on a day-to-day basis. The survey was limited to citizens who deal with the process only on a limited basis. It is felt that there may be some confusion created by combining building permitting with property code maintenance which is conducted by the police department as the average citizen has difficulty telling "one inspector from another" and, in fact, may have had more contact with code enforcement personnel who work in the neighborhoods on a daily basis.

Access to affordable housing received low ratings (37% or fair). While this rating is consistent with the national benchmark, it does reflect the need for more affordable housing in Rockville. At the same time, it does not identify what is considered to be affordable housing in Rockville.

Preliminary Department Response

With the adoption and implementation of the new Zoning Ordinance, more information about the development process will be available to the general public as the notification processes are being expanded. New manuals, improved procedures, and improved website information are

being implemented to address customer needs and concerns. The survey noted that a significant percentage of Rockville residents receive City information from post cards and special mailings. Both these processes are being improved and expanded as part of zoning ordinance implementation. The survey also noted that most of those surveyed depend upon Rockville Reports, which indicates that distributing information via that instrument must be continued and expanded.

The survey does not measure the overall development review processes, because the City residents who are surveyed do not utilize them. Since development review decisions do impact quality of life for residents, it might be advisable to survey individuals directly involved in development review and building permit processes in the near future.

Rockville 2008 Citizen Survey **Police Department**

Significant Results

Police services are a key driver and core service for the City of Rockville. A review of the statistics from this past year's survey indicates that 78% of the community felt that the overall police services provided were either excellent or good. In two specific areas, crime prevention and traffic enforcement, respondents felt that these services were either good or excellent with ratings scores of 69% and 77% as the respective combined percentage ratings.

In response to the survey question about feeling safe walking in your neighborhood, 87% of the respondents indicated they felt safe or reasonably safe during the day. However, only 54% felt the same while walking at night. The same held true for the business areas. Eighty-seven percent felt safe/reasonably safe during the daytime, but only 49% felt safe/reasonably safe at night.

Overall, the police services were rated as similar to the national norm.

In the Code Enforcement areas, residential property maintenance code enforcement was rated above the national norm, while commercial property maintenance code enforcement received a rating similar to the national norms.

Although these results are encouraging, they are not at the level we would like.

Some salient factors, which may help us, understand the ratings are as follows:

Having two police departments in the City:

The County and City Police both patrol within City limits and handle calls-for-service. With the recent switch over by the county police to a dark uniform similar to ours, it is difficult for a citizen to actually be able to differentiate the police departments and rate accordingly.

The urbanization of the City of Rockville:

With higher density, both in building mass and population, comes additional public safety issues and concerns. The community cannot be considered a bedroom suburban community any longer. With the city rapidly transforming to an urban environment, we do experience more city type public safety issues, such as high volume pedestrian traffic at different times of the day and night, a larger transient population at and around our local metro stops, very large high schools within our residential areas (larger volumes of traffic, both pedestrian and motor vehicle), and an overall upsurge in the night life activity, particularly in the Town Center/Town Square area.

Being right next to the nation's capital, the media attention to all incidents that occur in the Metro area impacts residents' perceptions of the level of crime that actually occurs in their community.

Preliminary Department Response

In our continuing effort to improve the citizens' perceptions of what we do, we will be concentrating additional efforts as follows:

Community Outreach:

We feel that we need to continue to reach out to the community as much as possible. Our reports to the civic associations, timely notifications to specific neighborhoods on possible issues or items of interest, attendance at many civic events, high visibility traffic mitigation efforts, strong animal control activities, and effective code enforcement are all daily occurrences. We need to ensure that the community is fully aware of all these efforts, and at the same time, ensure that input by the community is appreciated, and that the community is advised of same.

Internal Training:

We will be completing some internal training to all our staff, to re-emphasize our commitment to a fair and courteous service delivery style.

Rockville 2008 Citizen Survey
Public Works Department

Significant Results and Preliminary Department ResponseLeaf Collection

- Between 355 and I-270, the decline in service quality ratings may be influenced by the time the survey was conducted (early November) which was just after the leaves fell and before we were collecting in that area.

Water Services

- Overall, drinking water satisfaction has steadily improved as compared to previous years. Drinking water satisfaction has improved on the West side (64%) and drinking water satisfaction is lower on the Central and East side (58% and 63%, respectively).

- Nearly 20% of Rockville residents obtain their water from WSSC and not Rockville's water plant. Many of these residents live in the central and eastern sections of Rockville (King Farm and College Gardens). Their scores and comments may reflect satisfaction or lack thereof with WSSC rather than the City.
- WSSC experienced a major water line rupture in the fall of 2008 that resulted in a boil water order from Maryland Department of the Environment for several days. Rockville residents may have been thinking of these circumstances when they responded to the survey. In the next survey, we may want the respondents to tell us whether they obtain their water from the City or WSSC as part of the threshold information collected.
- Last summer and early fall, the City was frequently flushing lines on the east side to ensure the quality and freshness of water in the drinking water lines. In addition, the City boosted its chlorine dosage above the norm to ensure the water was safe. These temporary measures may have also contributed to the survey results.
- Public had increased awareness that Rockville government is proactively addressing issues or potential issues with water system. Therefore, people may have rated quality higher.

Recycling and Refuse

- Quality of recycling and refuse is still very high with recycling service showing improvement as implementation of the new recycling and refuse program began.

Traffic and Transportation

- All safety ratings have improved by at least 1%. It should be noted that "feeling safe crossing the street in Rockville" improved by 4%.
- All "Ease of travel" categories (by car, walking, or bicycle) have improved by at least 3%. This is a very good sign, especially when new trips were generated between early 2007 and late 2008. Also, all 3 categories have scored higher than any survey conducted since 2001.
- The survey results also revealed that the ratings of ease of travel by bicycle in the area between I-270 and Route 355 is lower than in the east and west of the City. This is expected due to the heavy traffic in the center section of Rockville. Although new bike lanes were added in E. Middle Lane and Beall Avenue, more parks and bike paths are available in the east and west of the City. Therefore, this trend will likely continue in future years.
- Street lighting ratings did not improve between the 2007 and 2008 surveys. Most of the streetlights on the east side of Rockville belong to Pepco, and although the City has requested proposals from Pepco to install new lights in this area, actual improvements were not in place by November 2008. Most of the improvements will be performed in 2009.
- It is important to note that in 2009, Pepco will re-lamp (replace the old lamps) for all streetlights in neighborhoods on the east side of Rockville. The lamps in this area have faded and were in their last year of their 5-year life span in 2008. Pepco also has a 5-year plan to replace the Mercury Vapor lights with High Pressure Sodium lights, which are 50% brighter and do not fade.
- City staff plans to continue adding more lights on existing wooden poles, but the pole locations are set, and therefore, limit the amount of improvement made by the City, especially in the area east of Route 355. It should be noted that the same issue exists at some locations between Route 355 and I-270, such as West End and Hungerford, but

much less in the area west of I-270, where almost all the lights are underground (City-owned) lights.

Rockville 2008 Citizens Survey **Recreation and Parks**

Significant Results

When compared to benchmarks, Recreation and Parks staff are gratified that, again this year, the majority of ratings for Recreation and Parks services were equal to or improved over the 2007 survey results, and most were *above* the national benchmarks. The ratings above the benchmarks include:

- Appearance of City parks
- Recreational programs
- Recreation centers
- Athletic fields
- Playgrounds
- Range of activities available in parks and recreation centers and facilities
- Rockville Senior Center programs and services
- Services to youth
- Used a Rockville recreation center
- Rockville as a place to raise children
- Opportunities to attend cultural or arts events
- Overall appearance of Rockville
- Ease of travel in Rockville by bicycle

Two ratings were similar to the national benchmarks:

- Safety of parks and recreation centers and facilities
- Rockville's natural environment

Two ratings were below the national benchmarks:

- Used a Rockville park (although 83% of respondents used a park!)
- Participated in a recreation program

Other significant results include:

- 80% of respondents attended a cultural or arts event and 72% participated in as many as 26 events
- 86% of respondents rated Special Events as excellent or good
- 64% of respondents rated street tree maintenance as excellent or good
- Strong ratings for Special Events.
- Senior Citizen Services received high ratings. The City continues to improve these services with new programs identified as important by residents, such as Aging-in-Place, and is working to meet excess demand for fitness space at the Senior Center.
- Many residents responded, "Don't know" to the question on the City's efforts to operate sustainable facilities, parks, etc. The environmentally friendly design of Thomas Farm Community Center, and future projects such as the Police Station, the Gude Drive Maintenance Yard and others will help to raise public awareness of this important City

initiative. A pilot to begin recycling in City parks will also help raise awareness of the City's overall initiatives to improve sustainability.

- Use of the department's automated registration system continues to increase, consistent with the survey results for growing use of the City's website and other technology-based services.

Preliminary Department Response:

The following issues are considered of particular importance and Recreation and Parks staff will develop specific and detailed action plans:

- East – Central – West – Many City services, including Recreation and Parks categories, continue to be rated lower by respondents on the East side of Rt. 355. Following the 2007 survey, a number of specific action plans were devised with the goal of improving ratings from East Rockville residents. These plans will be updated and new initiatives will be proposed.
- Safety of parks and recreation centers and facilities – It is crucially important to the overall success of our services that residents feel safe in the parks and at City facilities. The 2008 overall rating of 66 is 3 points higher than 2007 and similar to the national benchmark. 79% of respondents rated safety as excellent or good.

In the 2008 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Survey a similar question was asked and 89% of respondents said they feel safe in City parks. When asked, "why they feel safe," the most common response was "having lots of people around;" followed by "park being well maintained" and "having good lighting."

- Street Tree Maintenance – Every residential street, and most commercial roads, in Rockville are lined with street trees, so this service affects just about every Rockville resident, worker, business owner, etc. The contractor cost to maintain our street trees has increased dramatically in the past five years, reducing the number of trees that are trimmed each year. Additional funding has been added to the budget. Over the past year, particular emphasis on neighborhood block pruning has been focused on neighborhoods east of Rt. 355. Staff will research ways to continue to improve street tree maintenance and frequency.
- Participation in Recreation Programs – Nearly half of all respondents report participating in a recreation program, which is considered by staff to be a substantial participation level. Recreation programs tend to involve a multi-week or even multi-month commitment of time. So it is natural that participation rates are lower for these programs than for categories such as attendance at events, or visiting a park. This rating was, however, below the national norm. Total registrations in recreation programs exceeded 40,000 in FY 08, counting sports leagues. Respondents may have not thought to include participation in sports leagues, which was the intention. The question will be re-worded for the next survey. The largest participation in recreation programs is among youth; the lowest rates are among adults from age 21 to 50. Staff is beefing up marketing efforts, using e-marketing to reach adults and will continue to strategize on ways to involve more residents.